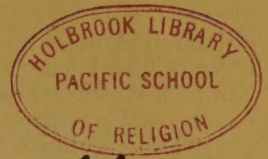


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

The letter about co-operation between Great Britain and Russia published a fortnight ago has brought me the following most instructive comment from a Russian friend. He is a theologian and student of contemporary life and was attached to the Russian Academy in Paris where he was one of the ablest of a remarkably able group. He happened to be in this country when the Germans invaded France, and has resided here during the past year:

THE TRAVAIL OF THE RUSSIAN SOUL

"I was greatly interested, and even moved, by the letter about Russia printed in the C.N.L., although I do not agree with the writer in all he says. I write as a Russian who left Russia as a boy in 1923, and who through the force of circumstances, and not through his own choice, belongs to the so-called 'White' Russians.

"Russia is again emerging from the isolation in which Stalin has enclosed her, and is entering the arena of world-history. It is evident to me that the war between Germany and Russia has a deeper and more decisive significance for the fate of Russia and of Europe than can be judged from the purely military point of view. Unfortunately in this country it is almost exclusively this point of view which is receiving attention. The alliance between Great Britain and Soviet Russia is much more than a question of self-preservation for Britain.

"There is, on the other hand, a widespread tendency in this country, also reflected in the letter you quote, which is very harmful—to deny or mitigate all the evil and untruth which came to light in the Communist Revolution in Russia, and to libel and blacken all Russia's past before the Revolution. In fact this past was in many ways much better than the present. Soviet Russia herself lives to a great extent on this past: at the present moment, the Soviet Union lives 90 per cent. on the culture of the nineteenth century. One must look reality in the face, and struggle against untruth whenever and wherever it is manifested. The horror of the religious persecutions in Russia, the execution of priests, the burning of churches, is not only 'alleged,' as your correspondent suggests, but actual reality. The distinction between 'end' and 'means,' which has been stereotyped, and which is reproduced by your correspondent, seems to me quite insufficient. The Christian consciousness can admit any, even the most radical, ends of social revolution, but can scarcely admit the means of which it makes use—hate, murder and untruth. I recognise, however, that tragic historical events such as the Russian Revolution cannot be judged from an exclusively moralistic point of view. Moreover, to be an ideological opponent of Communism does not at all mean to belong to the anti-Communist Front. I can struggle spiritually against Communism, and yet *not* belong to that Front, since I do not want to mix in bad company. Hitler gives to his war against Russia an ideological justification, hoping in this way to evoke wide sympathy. But it is clear that all this is mere lying and deceit, to conceal his desire for domination and enslavement.

"I entirely agree with what your correspondent says about Soviet atheism. The usual pronouncements denouncing Communist atheism seem to be generally unconvincing. Communism did not invent godlessness. Bourgeois society has long been a godless society, not only in its conscious ideas, but in its life, which is much more important. The Christianity which has adapted itself to this society is a real stumbling-block, from which precisely godless Russia has freed us. The relationship between believing Christians and militant atheists is very com-

plicated. Atheists may be better than those who regard themselves as Christians, juster, more disinterested, more sacrificial. Intellectual honesty, the search for truth, and the impossibility of reconciling himself with the evil and suffering in the world can lead man to atheism. Atheism can be a dialectical moment on the path of the search for God. Such is Russian atheism, as anyone who is acquainted with its origin can see.

"The Revolution in Russia undoubtedly called forth a new social and religious consciousness, a new way of putting problems, more effectively than heretofore in Russia or Europe. The heart of religious life was transposed. It produced a new social body and gave it life. Through all the horrors of totalitarian Communism sounds the call to creation of those who have drained to the dregs the cup of social injustice. The question of social relationships is posed anew. Much of what we hear about the life of the Church in Russia witnesses to the fact that not only atheists, but believers too are full of the thirst for the realization of social justice; it is curious enough that the most sincere Communists are also beginning to feel that between the fundamental tenor of the religious-minded people and the ideal aspirations of Communism there is the possibility of a certain 'collaboration' (the Soviet speak of 'the leading role of religion'). The believers in Russia express more and more definitely the will to realize from within that which in the new social existence and consciousness of Soviet Russia is a revelation of eternal truth. They regard it as their religious duty and task to take a creative part in the realisation of new social possibilities. To this Hitler in spite of his rhetorical ideology can oppose only world-domination, expansion, and the idealisation of force and war. If one looks at life in Soviet Russia in the past years, one sees an unprecedented re-construction of a country, the re-moulding of man himself, a great social design facing the future, and an outburst of the activity of a people—perhaps 'mad' and even 'sinful,' but at the same time heroic, sacrificial and creative. One begins to realise that precisely in the U.S.S.R. from ashes and dust there is being born a new world, a new man, and a *new Russia*. Just in this war—a war not for Communism at all, but for Russia and the Russians against the destructive expansion of National-Socialism—this birth is being fulfilled. In it the sins and aberrations of Bolshevism are overcome. Russia has long entered on the path of 'nationalisation of the Revolution,' the 're-habilitation of the Fatherland,' of Russian history and Russian culture, including its religious elements. Russia is recovering her integrity, concentrating herself, and this is, consciously or unconsciously, a re-orientation and repentance. The war is the most decisive turning-point in this process. Here the present alliance with Great Britain can greatly help Russia, and Britain can be enriched by the great and important experience of Russia's historical destiny.

"I read with great joy of the suggestion for practical collaboration apart from military help, and for closer social and intellectual relations between Great Britain and Russia. There is more reason for this than the present war situation. It would, however, be necessary to say more about this than a letter allows."

RACE DISCRIMINATION

A vigorous manifestō was published a few weeks ago in the United States on the subject of justice for Negro Americans in the programme for national defence. It was signed by sixty representative citizens including well-known leaders in public life, heads of great industrial companies, presidents of well-known universities, leaders of the Churches, Protestant and Roman Catholic, and other prominent citizens. It calls attention to the fact that many Negro Americans who are eager to serve their country are hindered from doing so by the fact that some corporations of national importance with large government contracts have been unwilling to employ skilled Negro workers and that some of the leading industrial plants do not approve of the inclusion of Negroes in training classes even when these are financed by the Federal Government. The signatories do not pronounce judgment on the facts, but demand a thorough, impartial and prompt investigation of the extent of the discriminations, their basic causes, the relative degree of responsibility for them of management, labour and the public, and the best way of meeting them. They insist that a question of principle is involved, and state it in the following paragraphs:

"In so far as ignorance and race prejudice are responsible for determining our attitude toward any American citizen in the present emergency, to that degree do we uproot the moral bases of our American civilization and make way for the totalitarian scheme of life. Dictatorship

aims to dominate the world by force, and to condemn certain racial groups permanently to subservient and inferior status. If we oppose Axis doctrines we must, to be consistent, oppose all race prejudice at home. There has been some progress in recent years, but if race prejudice is given a new foothold under existing world conditions it is bound to spread and poison the entire body politic.

"This is no time for Americans to compromise with race prejudice and its attendant discriminations in industrial defense programs, whether public or private. It is destructive of those basic essentials of civilization—political, cultural, educational, religious—which the ages have built upon the concept of the dignity and destiny of the human person. We maintain, therefore, that the time has come for the lasting repudiation of race prejudice as an influence in determining the politics of the nation."

President Roosevelt has since issued an appeal against racial discrimination in factories and stated that he expected the War Production Board to take immediate steps to make the fullest use of the productive manpower of the United States. I showed the American manifesto to a friend who is an expert in British Colonial questions, and who writes to me as follows:

"This declaration must be of the deepest interest to this country. We, too, are fighting against the totalitarian conception of a world in which some races are destined to be masters and others their servants. We, too, have non-European races within the borders of our Empire. Have we, like these Americans, been asking ourselves whether our dealings with them conform to the high terms in which our leaders distinguish our imperial policy from that of our opponents? We bear, as electors, the responsibility for policy in territories still under direct government from Whitehall. In Northern Rhodesia this very question of discrimination in industry which is troubling our American friends has lately arisen. Following the second outbreak in the last few years of rioting among African workers on the Copper-belt, a Commission was set up to enquire into the situation. It urged among other reforms the extension of opportunities in skilled labour to African workers. The Northern Rhodesian Government, in a very unsatisfactory reply, appears to endorse in practice the establishment of the South African industrial colour-bar in this territory. This is no issue that should be shelved until after the war. We should follow the example set in America and raise it now. Otherwise our claims to be fighting Nazism with the weapons of the spirit as well as of the flesh will be a mere exercise in propaganda."

How serious the problem is with which we have to deal in our own Empire is made plain in a new book by Dr. Norman Leys, *The Colour Bar in East Africa*.¹ One does not need to agree with everything that the author says or proposes to be glad that there are those among us who see these evils so clearly that they will not allow our consciences to rest.

THE WILES OF THE DEVIL

Christianity and Crisis, which may perhaps be described as our opposite number in the United States, contains a paper on "The Devil and Politics" by M. Denis de Rougemont, a well-known Swiss writer who is at present in America. He begins by quoting a remark of André Gide's that the devil's first trick is to make us believe that he does not exist. Like Ulysses to the Cyclops he says "I am Nobody. What should you be afraid of?" But as he found it increasingly difficult in the present century to maintain his incognito, he had recourse to a second trick in order to keep the democracies lulled in sleep. From 1933 onwards he persuaded them that he was simply Hitler. This belief, however, is a delusion in regard to Satan's real stature. His true name is Legion. He assumes as many aspects as there are individuals in the world. The really diabolical thing about Hitler is the way in which he has persuaded Germans that all evil came from the Treaty of Versailles, or from Jews, that is to say, from *others*. We see only Hitler. We act against him and in doing so we no longer see our true demons. The trick is played, and we are taken in.

The supreme achievement of the devil has been in making democrats believe that they did not like evil at all, that they were good and others wicked and that the whole thing is as simple as all that. From that moment democracy has become the devil's best instrument for duping us. In the France of 1939 almost every Frenchman sincerely believed himself to be anti-Nazi. But Hitler came, France capitulated, and to-day the anti-fascist intellectuals of Paris suddenly discover that at bottom Nazism is not so bad, and that on the whole they had always desired something passably resembling it.

"It seems to me," the article continues, "that the clearest lesson which emerges from European events is this: the sentimental hatred of the evil which is in others may blind to the evil which one bears in himself, and to the gravity of evil in general. I suspect a profound ambivalence in certain democratic denunciations of Hitlerism: the violence of the tone and the obstinate simplification of the issues betray our bad conscience, our secret anxiety, our unacknowledged temptation. Before anti-fascists who wish only to be *anti* I cannot help thinking that sooner or later the *pro* which slumbers in a corner of their soul will suddenly awaken and overwhelm them. I have seen too many cases of this kind, individual and collective. I saw the population of the Saar throw itself into Hitler's arms in 1935. I saw Social-democratic Vienna transformed in twenty-four hours into a Vienna delirious with Hitlerian passion. I saw France, or let us say rather certain Frenchmen, discover inside a few weeks the 'good points' of the totalitarian system. I believe that I know whereof I speak when I say to honest democrats: Look at the devil that is among us. Stop believing that he can only resemble Hitler, for it is *you yourself* that he will always contrive to resemble the most. If you want to catch him, I am going to tell you where you will most surely find him: seated in your own armchair. It is in you alone that you will catch him in the very act. And then only will you be in a state to track him down in others. And then only will you be cured of your almost incredible naïveté before the totalitarian danger."

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We decided at the beginning to offer a short term subscription for three months in order to allow new readers an opportunity of sampling the News-Letter. A good many availed themselves of the offer and helped to establish our membership. But a growing majority, in renewing their membership, prefer to subscribe for six or twelve months. More than 90 per cent. of our membership have subscribed for the longer period. We have decided therefore to discontinue the three months subscription, which involves a heavy burden of clerical work. In the future, subscriptions will be accepted only for six months or twelve months. Group subscriptions may, however, be made for three months as hitherto.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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